

THE CONSTRUCTIVIST LEADER

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Toward a Theory of Constructivist Leadership

Linda Lambert

The development of collective meaning is an essential characteristic of a learning organization.

Peter Senge

The Fifth Discipline (1990, p. 241)

During this century, concepts about learning and leading have been influenced by similar historical and philosophical ideas. Constructivism has emerged as an important educational perspective that is changing how educational researchers, writers, and practitioners view the world of teaching and learning. A constructivist perspective requires a reexamination of the concept of leadership as well, since it is central to our argument that the relationship between learning and leading philosophies is a dynamic one, each view changing as it is influenced by the other. The constructivist learning perspective has given rise to expectations that constructivism is critical to adult learning. This book examines the relationship between adult learning in schools and the role and function of leadership.

All humans bring to the process of learning personal schemas that have been formed by prior experiences, beliefs, values, sociocultural histories, and perceptions. When new experiences are encountered and mediated by reflection and social interaction, meaning and knowledge are constructed. Learning takes place, as does adult development. When actively engaged in reflective dialogue, adults become more complex in their thinking about the world, more tolerant of diverse perspectives, more flexible and open toward new experiences. Personal and professional experiences require an interactive professional culture if adults are to engage with one another in the processes of growth and development.

Yet rarely are adults members of coherent, dynamic educational communities in which they develop "collective meaning together." Bound by rules, schedules, policies, hierarchical roles, and time-worn practices, educators often experience cultures that limit interaction and mitigate against professional growth. They have few opportunities to engage in the reciprocal

processes that would call forth their ideas and successful experiences and enable them to make sense of their world together. Nor do they experience the supported encounters with discrepant information about teaching and learning that are essential for moving toward significant change. Hurried interactions of the sort that often characterize faculty room encounters and faculty meetings tend to draw on the sameness of teaching, reaffirming and reiterating similar educational practices. "Business as usual," the business of schooling, protects us from differences and therefore from challenges to our old ways of thinking while it "protects" us from growth.

Leadership that would change our schools and our communities must be cognizant of the essential actions needed to alter the lives of teachers in schools. It must address the need for sense-making, for coherence, for seeing educational communities as growth-producing entities. Leadership must be formed around the principles of constructivist learning for adults that capture these possibilities for learning. Leadership must be redefined.

This new conception of leadership is based on the same ideas that underlie constructivist learning: Adults learn through the processes of meaning and knowledge construction, participation, and reflection. The function of leadership must be to engage people in the processes that create the conditions for learning and form common ground about teaching and learning. Schooling must be organized and led in such a way that these learning processes provide direction and momentum to human and educational development. This chapter explores and seeks to interpret the influence that the constructivist perspective is having on our notions about leadership. We will refer to Constructivist Leadership as

the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling.

In this text, *leadership* is defined as a concept transcending individuals, roles, and behaviors. Therefore anyone in the educational community—teachers, administrators, parents, students—can engage in leadership actions. In the development of a theory of leadership, we combine and interpret assumptions regarding reciprocal processes, participation in educational communities, construction of meaning, and common purpose about schooling that lead us toward an explanation of Constructivist Leadership.

Constructivist Leadership can be distinguished from current notions of leadership that are influencing education and business in a number of ways, particularly in reference to who leads, the role of constructivist learning, and the need for community.

NOTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Never before has society struggled with notions of leadership in such interesting and complex ways. Rost (1991), in his extensive historical review of leadership, argues that it is a concept that is rarely defined, a concept that often eludes those who work in the field. According to Hodgkinson (1991), there are over a hundred "serious" definitions of leadership.

Recent definitions of leadership that have influenced work in schools contain both the best promises for a new conception of leadership and the constraints and contradictions that limit their views. Among the numerous current writers influencing the practice of leadership in education and business are Peter Senge, Michael Fullan, Roland Barth, Phillip Schlechty, Steven Covey, Thomas Sergiovanni, Diane Dunlap, Harold Hodgkinson, John Gardner, Margaret Wheatley, William Foster, Joseph Rost, and Warren Bennis. Many of them are educators, yet a significant number, such as Senge, Gardner, Bennis, Covey, and Wheatley, have entered the field of leadership through business or organizational development.

Definitions of leadership have often been confused with definitions of *leader*, and the terms are often used interchangeably. "The problem with the organization is leadership," an analyst might claim when referring to a specific person, the "leader." Most writers in the field interchange the two notions, viewing leadership as the work of the leader.

There are persistent patterns of process that characterize what leaders do or leadership is. Whether a writer is describing leadership or leader, definitions inevitably fall into three categories: (1) what the leader does, (2) for or with whom the action is taken, and (3) toward what end the actions are taken. A few illustrative definitions from the work of these authors will clarify this three-dimensional analysis:

Peter Senge (1990): *Leaders* design learning processes whereby people throughout the organization deal productively with issues and learn the disciplines. (Michael Fullan [1993] uses a definition that is similar to Senge's.)

Phillip Schlechty (1990): *Leaders* invite others to share authority. Others are those who accept the invitation and share responsibility.

Stephen Covey (1991): *Leaders* foster mutual respect and build a complementary team in which strengths are made productive and weaknesses become essentially irrelevant.

Roland Barth (1992): *Leaders* make happen that in which you believe while working with all in a community of leaders.

William Foster (1989): *Leadership* is the reciprocal processes among leaders and followers working toward a common purpose.

John Gardner (1990): *Leadership* is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group (followers) to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared with his or her followers. (In 1991, Sergiovanni's definition was essentially the same as Gardner's.)

Joseph Rost (1991): *Leadership* is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.

Margaret Wheatley (1992): *Leadership* is context-dependent and relational among leaders and followers, with an emphasis on the concepts of community, dignity, meaning, and love.

In most of these conceptions, the processes of either the "leader" or of "leadership" are summed up by a single verb: *design, foster, invite, persuade, influence*. Leaders typically do things to or for others—for instance, "design learning processes" (Senge and Fullan), "invite others to share authority" (Schlechty), "foster mutual respect" (Covey), or engage in "an influence relationship" (Rost) or a "process of persuasion" (Gardner and Sergiovanni). The strong implication is that someone is designing for or acting on another or others. This action is directional and hierarchical, the process being applied to a group of followers who may work as individuals or as members of a team. A sharp distinction from this traditional view may be seen as Foster's (1989) characterization of leadership as "the reciprocal processes," although he does not explain the meaning of these processes.

Those "others" who are the subject of the action are most often referred to as "followers." For instance, the "for or with whom the action is taken" portion of current definitions usually refers to relationships among leaders and followers or individuals who choose to be recruited. Barth, Rost, Foster, and Wheatley present patterns that are communal and relational, suggesting that reciprocity might be possible—for instance, "all in a community of leaders" (Barth), "a complementary team" (Covey), "among leaders and followers who intend real changes" (Rost), "relational among leaders and followers" (Wheatley). However, Foster, Gardner, Sergiovanni, Rost, and Wheatley proceed to use the language of followership, a constraining concept that imposes a mind-set of inequitable participation. The follower, as a root metaphor, conjures up images of walking behind, being alert to the cues of the "real" leader, waiting one's turn. Even those who seek to bring enlightenment to the dim concept of followership assume that a conscious shift in power and self-perception would be necessary in order to move from the role of follower into the role of leader.

The third element of leadership definitions—"toward what end the action is taken"—generally refers to the product or outcome of the influence

or power relationship. Senge, Fullan, Covey, and Schlechty suggest that the quality of the working relationship might be an "end" in itself, and their writings are rich with additional values and purposes for learning organizations. One can infer from their works that they understand and trust that, when a learning organization (an organization that is continually renewing itself) is built, people will be increasingly able to commit themselves to a larger purpose. Foster looks "toward a common purpose," while Schlechty anticipates "shared responsibility" and Wheatley identifies "community, dignity, meaning, and love" as laudable outcomes. These "ends" represent the outcomes to be achieved or produced by the followers working together. Most of these definitions are behavioral in character: The leader designs a process, which acts on the followers in order to produce a certain outcome.

Rost (1991), in an extensive analysis of influential writers from 1900 through 1990, found a consistent picture of the conceptions of leadership:

Leadership is good management. . . . Leadership is great men and women with certain preferred traits influencing followers to do what the leaders wish in order to achieve group/organizational goals that reflect excellence defined as some kind of higher-level effectiveness. (p. 180)

Rost refers to this composite definition as the "industrial leadership paradigm," which is hierarchical, individualistic, reductionistic, linear, mechanical—ideas which are worlds away from the ideas in this book and the needs of today's schools and society.

TOWARD A NEW CONCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP

Above we examined three dimensions of the definition of *leader* or *leadership*. The definition of Constructivist Leadership that we are proposing is initially most closely aligned to "the reciprocal processes" proposed by Foster. The major distinction that can be made from current definitions of leadership lies in the "for or with whom the action is taken" dimension: "participants in a educational community to construct meanings." This distinction is at the heart of the constructivist nature of leadership: that adults in a community can work together to construct meaning and knowledge. The balance of this chapter examines each dimension of this definition in turn:

The reciprocal processes that enable . . .
participants in an educational community to construct meanings . . .
that lead toward a common purpose of schooling

Since leadership is viewed as essentially the enabling reciprocal processes among people, leadership becomes manifest within the relationships

in a community, manifest in the spaces, the fields among participants, rather than in a set of behaviors performed by an individual leader. The school culture, the field in which we work, is permeated with opportunities for exercising leadership of this character. This culture, or field, among us is imbued with our histories, energies, emotions and thoughts, conflicts and affections. Greene (1988) finds in these spaces among us the possibilities for creating an authentic presence with each other . . . being real and vulnerable with each other in ways that engage us in genuine conversations. Hannah Arendt, Greene reminds us, called these spaces the "in-between" (quoted in Greene, 1988, p. 17). Vygotsky (1962) understood well the value of those fields, the in-between, as present in the "zone of proximal development" through which participants negotiate their own meanings, knowledge, and intelligence, influenced by social, cultural, and historical forces. He envisioned these spaces between and among people as being the central arena through which individuals in interaction make sense of what they think and believe and create new ideas and information. This is not unlike Kegan's (1982) "zone of mediation" for meaning-making, through which individuals labor toward new understandings. To this extent, leadership provides us with a "third dimension"—a set of untapped opportunities that exist within the culture of the school. There are the individual minds of educators in the school community, the minds of others in that community, and the richness of ideas and questions as yet unexplored or unasked that exist among us.

The authors of this text propose that leadership inhabits these spaces, fields, or zones among educators in a professional community. Leadership, like energy, is not finite, not restricted by formal authority and power; it permeates a healthy school culture and is undertaken by whoever sees a need or an opportunity. Occupying these "zones," leadership is different from an act of leadership, for it can be omnipresent among and within all participants. Leadership possibilities permeate our interactions and inform our actions. A new teacher is having trouble? An experienced teacher might intervene, provide assistance, secure other resources and ideas, mentor. In a culture rich in leadership connections, this experienced teacher does not have to be recruited; he or she is a fully functioning professional leader. Barth (1988) seems to have this notion in mind when he talks about a "community of leaders." Lieberman (1985, 1988, 1992, 1994), in her extensive and continual discussions of the relationships in collaborative work, understands the criticalness of human interaction and the emergence of professionalism.

The Reciprocal Processes That Enable . . .

Constructivist leadership involves *the reciprocal processes that enable* participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose of schooling. It is important to understand that

the capacity for reciprocity is the result of long years of meaning-making with others (Kegan, 1982). To be able to move outside oneself, to differentiate one's perceptions from those of another, to practice empathy, to move out of the self and observe the responses and thoughts of another—all are prerequisites to reciprocity. Reciprocity, or the mutual and dynamic interaction and exchange of ideas and concerns, requires a maturity that emerges from opportunities for meaning-making in sustainable communities over time. As adults, we need to be able to engage in processes of meaning-making as we live and work together in educational communities if capacities for reciprocity are to be developed. "Knowledge is not *extended* from those who consider that they know to those who consider that they do not know," pointed out Paulo Freire in 1973; "knowledge is built up in the relations between human beings" (p. 109, emphasis added).

Judith Warren Little (1982) saw multiple forms of relationships in schools more than a decade ago. She identified differences among congenial and collegial and thoroughly individualistic relationships, findings that have recently been echoed by Michael Fullan in his work with Toronto schools. These relationships shift as the collegial nature of the professional culture alters over time. Reciprocity tends to be a spiraling experience, gathering strength as it is practiced. Wheatley (1992) attributes further meaning to relationships when she explains that individuals generate information in their interactions with each other, information that becomes a feedback spiral enriching and creating additional information.

The reciprocal processes that enable us to construct meaning occur within the context of relationships. The creation and expansion of our possibilities and capacities for reciprocity occur in communities rich in relationships. We need to stop thinking of roles or people as fixed entities and instead view them as relationships, as patterns of relationships that involve one another: "Patterns do not 'contain' one another, but rather 'involve' one another" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 71). "Patterns that involve" is reminiscent of Bateson's "patterns which connect" (1972), which encompasses both the relationship and the pattern of meaning. These consistent, repetitive forms reveal patterns of relationships that evolve and deepen over time.

A pattern of relationship can reveal itself in governance structures in schools. Many schools and districts have separated and fragmented governance processes, such as a leadership team, school site council, curriculum committee, PTA, professional development committee, and so forth; these tend to operate in isolation, neither involving nor connecting with one another. As a result, decision-making is time-consuming and parallel, redundant and perfunctory, disengaged from the information and feedback systems that could bring a grounding in values. The fragmented processes deny coherence of practice and the building of the school communities. These gov-

ernance groups can be coordinated so that they become connected by information, products, and people. Integrated structures are essential to connecting relationships. When people are connected together, the opportunities for conversations and meaning-making become self-evident.

A recent study by the Claremont Graduate Schools' Institute for Education in Transformation (Poplin & Weeres, 1993) was published under the title *Voices from the Inside*. Three qualities make this study report profound: (1) Both lead and associate researchers were teachers; (2) it was conducted as a series of dialogues; and (3) it discovered that the most important factor in schools is *relationships*. Speaking eloquently about their work, the researchers write:

For it is in the coming to know that we came to want to act. It is in the listening that we changed. It is in the hearing our own students speak, as if for the first time, that we came to believe. This is what we heard. . . . Relationships dominated all participant discussions about issues of schooling. No group inside the schools felt adequately respected, connected, or affirmed. (p. 19)

All participants in the Claremont study—students, parents, teachers, administrators, classified staff—felt a deep absence of authentic relationships in which they were trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity and respect. In reference to this last statement, it is important to note that perceptions of caring varied among groups. For teachers, dedication to their work indicated caring; for students, caring on the part of teachers was shown more directly and personally—touching, using their names, being asked about or told personal things, laughing with them. A middle school teacher observed: "Our data is contrary to the way most of us traditionally have thought about schooling in which curriculum is at the center of the model and measures of school productivity are there. And here we're saying we have to put relationships at the core of what we're doing." (p. 20) *Would teachers have questioned that myth if they had not discovered it themselves?* Not likely.

Teachers and administrators in *Voices* further realized that their relationships were dominated by rules, regulations, and contractual agreements. Administrators admitted that changes are often unsuccessful because preliminary dialogue is rushed. Those who survive in spite of arid, impersonal environments devoid of meaningful relationships often go elsewhere for what they need, as explained by one middle school student:

If I talk to my parents sometimes they get mad at me because of what I say to them. Or maybe they're too busy. If I talk to teachers I can't tell them that I said a bad word or something because they suspend me. So I guess the only people

that understand are gangsters. They always understand and they always help me solve it too. (p. 13)

Reciprocal relationships, the meanings of which must be discussed and commonly construed in schools, are the basis through which we make sense of our world, continually define ourselves, and "coevolve," or grow together. With relationships, we give up predictability for potentials. Potentials are those abilities within us that can develop or become actual, those personal passions and personal schemas that enable us to construct meaning and knowledge. They exist in possibilities; they are unpredictable, yet limitless; they are built on relationships and connecting patterns; they are dynamic and paradoxical; and they are continuously renewing themselves. We must evoke or provoke potential (Wheatley, 1992)—it does not appear on command (or through "persuasion, recruitment, or enlistment").

While the chapters ahead provide a more detailed look at reciprocal processes along with practical examples, it is essential here to portray what is meant by these processes. These portrayals are examples and will undoubtedly give rise to thoughts of other processes as the reader ponders them. *Reciprocal processes* are understood as those that:

- Evoke potential in a trusting environment
- Reconstruct, or "break set," with old assumptions and myths
- Focus on the construction of meaning
- Frame actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions

Those processes that *evoke potential in a trusting environment* are those that enable individuals to call forth memories, perceptions, and assumptions that underlie and inform their work. These recollections may be elicited in the form of stories, discussions, brainstorming, writing, or even reenactment. These evoked ideas create an essential foundation for constructing meaning and knowledge together, for making our schemas explicit and public enables us to understand how we and others are making sense of the world.

Those processes that *reconstruct, or break set, with old assumptions and myths* necessitate a reexamination of accepted ideas and traditional interpretations. (To "break set" is to loosen one's attachment, adherence, and dependency on the assumptions that formed current schemas in order to consider or entertain new assumptions. Confronting and processing new information or experiences that are different from those that formed the original schemas can cause an individual to "break set," or disconnect from, old assumptions. This process can lead to the formation of new schemas and to changed perceptions and behaviors.) This aspect of the conversation involves gathering new data, posing questions that cause dissonance and disequilibrium be-

tween the held beliefs and new information, and reconceptualizing or redesigning the ideas in question. This "redesign" function may involve speculation, reframing, visioning, or imagining possibilities. As assumptions are reexamined, we can begin to make sense of new information and ideas.

Those processes that include the *focus on the construction of meaning* involve many of the same evocation processes described above (discussion, stories, writing) and entail combining or recombining these ideas so that they make sense to those involved. "Making sense" (constructing meaning) also requires the creation of new symbols or images (examples, metaphors, patterns) that form the basis for construal and interpretation. As adults share common experiences and common inquiry, assigned meanings converge, becoming more common than uncommon. Teachers begin to agree on—or at least to understand—the interpretations that they are making about teaching and learning.

Those processes that *frame actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions* involve the most practical aspect of the reciprocal processes. These undertakings may include establishing new criteria, planning approaches, identifying emerging goals and objectives, implementing new actions, evaluating progress, and redesigning or reframing the actions in response to the effectiveness and additional information generated by the process. These are the specific actions that emerge from the conversations.

These are spiraling processes, involving and building on each other and circling back upon themselves. New actions become the means through which other potentials are evoked, new information is generated, and deeper meanings are constructed.

The following scenario from a school we will call Evergreen Middle School describes how these processes may join together: As a staff that has deliberately planned to build a more collaborative working culture, they meet together for a professional development day. Two teachers are facilitating the work of the day, aimed at "designing working agreements for ourselves." The leadership team and the professional development committee have planned this day together.

First activity: In small groups, staff are asked to recall their best memory of a working group in which they felt energized by the processes and exceeded their goals. They share experiences. (*Evoking potential in a trusting environment*)

Second activity: They discuss as a whole group: What made these experiences so powerful? Could we re-create these experiences here? How would our experiences here need to change in order to re-create our work together? (*Reconstruct, or "break set," with old assumptions and myths*)

Third activity: They discuss in groups: What would these experiences look like if we were to create them here? What were the qualities or characteristics of these experiences that we would want to re-create here? Why? (*Focus on the construction of meaning*)

Fourth activity: The last activity asks: Based on our conversations this morning, what work agreements shall we establish? Small groups generate four to six ideas. All groups post work; whole group forms consensus. (*Frame actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions*)

The above example combines four phases of reciprocal processes involved in constructivism so that a staff can create together the parameters for their future work.

These processes involve rethinking our structures as well: "We must invent organizations where process is allowed its varied-tempo dance, where structures come and go as they support the process that needs to occur and where form arises to support the necessary relationships" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 68). These forms that support relationships are nodes of connections, channels of energy flow. We will call them "enabling structures." For instance, these places or intersections where people and energy converge might include groups, such as leadership teams, study or action research teams; places, such as a professional library, faculty research and development center, even open supply closets or "user-friendly" faculty rooms; and events, such as workshops, district dialogue sessions, or parent conversations.

The essential criterion for enabling structures involves an element of high synergy, which Carlsen (1988) explains as the positive reaction and interaction that occur when people do things for themselves and at the same time do things for others (reciprocity). Carlsen recalls Buckminster Fuller's 1978 work, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, in which he explains, "Synergy is the only word in our language that means the behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the separately observed behaviors of any of the system's separate parts or any subassembly of the system's parts" (quoted in Carlsen, 1988, p. 71). Larger than the sum of the parts, synergy in schools is the interaction dynamic arising from opportunities for joint conversation, work, and action. It is the by-product of true collegiality. We provide additional examples of school and district collegial structures in later chapters.

Participants in an Educational Community to Construct Meanings . . .

In Chapter 1, we discussed the process of *meaning-making* as constructivism; above we discussed leadership as the "reciprocal processes that

enable . . ." participants in an educational community to construct meanings. By participants we mean *all* members of the educational community, not segregated as leaders and followers. At any given time, roles and behaviors will shift among participants based on interest, expertise, experience, and responsibility. In more advanced school cultures, as in good marriages, roles are integrated or transcended.

Together we create and engage in experiences that we imbue with meaning, meanings informed by common experiences and also by our own personal schemas. The above example of the Evergreen staff working through a process for creating common work agreements is illustrative of these undertakings in schools. In Chapter 1, we discussed Kegan's concept of meaning-making as motion; this understanding is critical to the role of constructivism within the context of community. This motion, born of negotiating experiences together, gives force and purposeful direction to community. The Evergreen staff will never be quite the same; meaning-making together changes us and creates momentum (motion and direction) for our work together.

Bateson's (1972) concept of meaning as a synonym for "pattern" adds another rich dimension to our communal work: meaning-making for common patterns of understandings. When the Evergreen staff members have practiced their new agreements for a few months, the pattern of their understandings will deepen and further interpretations of their work will evolve from these new and common patterns, or practices. They will be "pulled into the future" (Land & Jarman, 1992) by this shared intention. Land and Jarman use this notion to mean that the realization of our hopes and goals becomes increasingly inevitable as we share intentions and work together in ways that exemplify these intentions. There has been set in motion a patterning process that gives rhythm and purpose, force and direction, to the educational community.

Experiences with educational communities that have evolved from sustained collaborative work have created an understanding of communities as the primary context for professional growth. "The constraints of constructed knowledge," point out Bransford, Goldman, and Pellegrino (1992, p. 116), "come largely from the community of which one is a member. In the absence of any community, we suppose that it would be possible for an individual to have an idiosyncratic view of the world—but then, because there is no community, the idiosyncrasy is irrelevant." In a community, views are brought into harmony or we agree to disagree—either way, we consider the other.

Since constructivist learning is a social endeavor, community is essential for learning to occur. In our definition of constructivist leadership, the educational community is considered the medium for meaning-making, for human growth and development. In this chapter community is defined in terms of its

natural ecological qualities and its relationship to constructivist leadership.

Fritjof Capra, author of *The Tao of Physics* (1975) and *The Turning Point* (1982), has recently turned his attention to education through his work with the (now) Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California. The Center has two major goals: to expand ecoliteracy as part of school curricula and to apply the principles of ecology to our work with whole-school cultural change. By "ecoliteracy," Center staff mean literacy in environmental principles and practices; by "ecology" they mean the guiding principles informing the development of all organisms and systems (see Figure 2.1). Capra has become interested in translating the concepts of ecology into social systems, in the tradition of Gregory Bateson in psychology and anthropology; Bruce Joyce, Elliott Eisner, John Goodlad, and C. A. Bowers in education; Robert Kegan in psychology; Robert Bellah in philosophy and political science; and, more recently, Theodore Roszak in political and environmental philosophy. In Figure 2.1, the principles of ecology are described by Capra (1993), and each statement is followed with my social interpretation that relates to communities that serve as settings for meaning-making and human development.

In order to create educational communities that function as ecological social systems, members of these communities work in *interdependence* with one another. They rely on and trust one another to provide the support and skills needed by the whole group. In order to evolve as educational communities, they must be *sustained* over time, since it takes time to deepen the spiral of meaning-making, seek common purpose, and develop interdependent professional cultures in schools. *Ecological cycles* require a fluid flow of information and feedback, spiraling processes that are essential to engagement with the disequilibrium that causes us to break set with old assumptions and construct meaning.

The biological systems described in Figure 2.1 are propelled by the *energy flow* of the sun. The energy driving the social systems is meaning-making, which we have described as developmental, as motion. These energy sources keep communities in motion. To understand meaning-making as the primary energy source of a community is critical to the understanding of constructivist leadership, which relies on communities in motion.

Partnerships with parents and the broader community are essential if information and learning opportunities are to enter and leave the culture of the school. *Flexibility* is basic to communities in motion if fluctuations, feedback, and surprises are to lead to change rather than disorientation in schools.

Diversity brings a complexity to the network of relationships that contains multiple perspectives and multiple resources and talents. Static, homogeneous relationships cannot challenge the thinking of its members, since

Figure 2.1. Principles of Ecology

BIOLOGICAL	SOCIAL
Interdependence	
All members of an ecosystem are interconnected in a web of relationships in which all life processes depend on one another. The success of the whole system depends on the success of its individual members, while the success of each member depends on the success of the system as a whole.	All members of a community are interconnected in a web of relationships in which all processes are <i>reciprocal</i> . The success of the community depends on the success of its individual members, and the success of each member depends on the success of the community as a whole.
Sustainability	
The long-term survival (sustainability) of each species in an ecosystem depends on a limited resource base.	The long-term survival of a community depends on a limited material resource base, shared talents and ideas, and sustained purpose.
Ecological Cycles	
The interdependencies among the members of an ecosystem involve the exchange of matter and energy in continual cycles. These ecological cycles act as feedback loops.	The interdependencies among the members of a community involve the exchange of energy and information in continual cycles. These ecological cycles act as feedback spirals (spirals, because they never return to the same place [Costa and Kallick, 1995])
Energy Flow	
Solar energy, transformed into chemical energy by the photosynthesis of green plants, drives all ecological cycles.	Human energy, experiences, and beliefs, transformed into <i>meaning and knowledge</i> , drive purposeful communities.
Partnership	
All living members of an ecosystem are engaged in a subtle interplay of competition and cooperation, involving countless forms of partnership.	All members of a community are engaged in a reciprocal interplay of competition and cooperation, involving countless forms of partnership.
Flexibility	
In their function as feedback loops, ecological cycles have the tendency to maintain themselves in a flexible state, characterized by interdependent fluctuations of their variables.	In their function as feedback spirals, ecological cycles in communities have the tendency to maintain themselves in a flexible state, characterized by interdependent fluctuations of their variables. Flexible communities give open rein to fluctuations and surprises, from which they derive innovations and change.

Figure 2.1. (continued)

BIOLOGICAL	SOCIAL
Diversity	
The stability of an ecosystem depends crucially on the degree of complexity of its network of relationships; in other words, on the diversity of the ecosystem.	The stability of a community depends crucially on the degree of complexity of its network of relationships; in other words, on the diversity of the ecosystem.
Coevolution	
Most species in an ecosystem coevolve through an interplay of creation and mutual adaptation. The creative reaching out into novelty is a fundamental property of life, manifest also in the processes of development and learning.	Most members of a community coevolve through an interplay of creation and mutual adaptation. The creative reaching out into novelty is a fundamental property of life, manifest also in the processes of development and learning.

individual and group thinking will stem from experiences and biases that are too similar. Diversity introduces the opportunity for participants to think and act in more complex ways. Such cognitive complexity involves the ability to understand and work with multiple perspectives; the capacity to think systemically; and the ability to access, generate, and process vast sources of information. Diversity in the learning environment improves our possibilities for developing such complexity and therefore the possibilities for variance and dissonance.

Coevolution refers to the idea that as we work together in collaborative professional cultures, we grow together. This book focuses on the multiple means of learning in a professional culture, including shared leadership, conversations, common language, and the use of narrative. Bransford and colleagues (1992) describe knowledge as "a dialect process": "By continually negotiating the meaning of observations, data, hypotheses, and so forth, groups of individuals construct systems that are largely consistent with one another" (p. 116). This dialectic is an essential aspect of coevolution.

A composite narrative of a social ecological community might be interpreted in this way:

A community is an interconnected and complex web of reciprocal relationships sustained and informed by their purposeful actions. Complexity is manifest in the diversity of the system; and the more diverse, the more rich and complex. Such communities are flexible and open to information provided through feedback spirals, as well as unexpected fluctuations and surprises that contain possibilities. The coevolution, or shared growth, of the participants in this community is propelled by

the joint construction of meaning and knowledge and involves continual creation and adaptation.

To borrow generously from Carl Rogers' (1959) concept of the "actualizing tendency" in individuals, these ecosystems are "actualizing communities," in the process of becoming more coherent and more growth-producing for both individuals and social groupings. In the process, these communities are responding to the dual nature of human beings to be both independent and interdependent, self-directed and interconnected. However, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Sidler, and Tipton (1985) would remind us that to focus too deeply on the nature and needs of human beings may lead us to narrowly therapeutic interpretations of community, designing communities that are aimed primarily at meeting the needs of the individual. Rather, we must seek communities that serve the needs of the broader society as well as the needs of the individual. Educational communities of this character concurrently attend to the professional development needs of the individual, to the professional culture of the group, and to the outcomes of the students. Bakan (1966) refers to this challenge to bring together the dual natures of humans as a moral imperative: to try to mitigate agency with communion. Costa and Garmston (1994) use the enticing word *holonomy* to refer to achieving the dual goals of independence and interdependence. "Some," comments Della Dora (personal communication), "call this 'democracy.'"

Such educational communities have coherence, a wholeness and an integration that characterize sense-making. Carlsen (1988) and Zohar (1990) agree on the centrality of coherence. For Carlsen, synergy and systems theory are the most appropriate conceptions within which to understand that a belief system serves as the lens through which we construct coherence and meaning. For Zohar, a world view is that organizing theme running through a life that gives it meaning and coherence. "If, at this personal level," claims Zohar, "one fails to sense some coherent world view, then life itself fragments. . . . If, at a social level, one fails to sense some coherent world view, the sense of self and others breaks down" (p. 232). Belief systems, world views, and personal schemas that are coherent require continually constructed meaning within the context of shared and created experiences. For many children and adults in our schools, both the sense of self and the sense of others have broken down. According to the children's voices in *Voices from the Inside* (Poplin & Weeres, 1993), coherence seems unlikely without caring, sustaining relationships.

Some schools are now reaching for these communities through which they can address society's most compelling dilemmas. Two major changes herald a new view of schools as meaning-making communities, both involving the creation of common experiences that lead to "zones of mediation"

for the construction of meaning. A common experience creates the opportunity for shared meaning-making as children and adults (or children with children or adults with adults) join together at the same time and place to discover what they know and think. They can talk about and mediate their histories within a common experience so that the journey occurs together. These two most promising of practices are the building of a collegial, professional culture for educators and the work in authentic assessment for children (and, increasingly, for adults as well). The collegial culture involves common agreements, study, planning, and inquiry; authentic assessment creates real opportunities for performance and product development. In order to meet the criteria for development that we are proposing in this chapter, authentic assessment must involve the children in establishing their own criteria for choice, interpreting their own progress, reflecting on their own thinking processes and talents. These are prerequisite behaviors for participation and leadership, as well as for cognitive complexity. Both authentic assessment and professional culture are shared, authentic, thoughtfully chosen, and mutually designed. These experiences help to create educational communities and are encouraged and enhanced by learning in a context of community.

In spite of the promise of educational communities that are based on ecological principles, communities can become fragmented and incoherent without leadership. Leadership is the factor that enables meaning to be constructed together in that it engages people in the essential reciprocal processes. Without value-driven, purposeful leadership, communities can become Balkanized, or focused on the self-serving purposes of an individual or a few individuals. Studies of cult communities such as Synanon (Lambert, 1982) recognize that even though many of the aspects of community may exist (interdependencies, purpose, feedback loops, support, and security), individual and societal growth can be dramatically restricted, then reversed. If flexibility and diversity are disallowed by acts of leadership by an individual who focuses on control and conformity, the rewards of community can become counterproductive. Hodgkinson (1991) similarly reminds us that organizations can be equally value-neutral, that the structures of organizations do not naturally support ethical behaviors. Organization and community can be amoral concepts.

Cult-type communities may articulate a purpose, usually the designated leader's purpose; however, this would not produce a moral community. What is it that creates a common purpose of schooling to which people freely commit?

That Lead Toward a Common Purpose of Schooling

Before the middle of this millenium, the Gutenberg printing press found itself esconced in a warehouse in Victor Hugo's Paris. In one particularly

powerful scene in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831/1978), a church archdeacon, on learning the purpose of the cumbersome machine, observed in outrage: "Alas and alack, small things overcome great ones! A tooth triumphs over a body. The Nile rat kills the crocodile, . . . the book will kill the building!" Hugo goes on to explain: "It was the terror and bewilderment felt by a man of the sanctuary before the luminous press of Gutenberg. . . . It was the cry of the prophet who already hears the restless surge of an emancipated mankind, who can see that future time when intelligence will undermine faith, opinion dethrone belief, and the world shake off Rome" (pp. 188–189). His prediction proved remarkably keen, for a fundamental shift in access to knowledge gave rise to the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment.

For most of the last three centuries, the schools have been the center of knowledge for the "common man." Today, American schools have not only lost their monopoly on knowledge—even their corner on knowledge has shrunk.

Several educational figures had been paddling swiftly against the tide. In 1979, Goodlad published a small work entitled, *What Are Schools For?*, in which he set forth the knowledge and competencies that schools should teach. Hirsch (1988) claimed the centrality of a common knowledge base (albeit European), and Adler laid out his *Paideia Program* (1984) for "essential" knowledge. These statements and arguments for a common knowledge base gave additional credence to the role of the schools as knowledge dispensers—purveyors of the canon—at a time when this ancient role is necessarily under scrutiny. Goodlad, Hirsch, and Adler are persuasive figures in American education and therefore have been significant forces in interpreting the purposes of schooling. While Hirsch was questioned on the accuracy of the chosen content in his proposed cultural literacy, few questioned the assumption that such content should serve as the foundation of schooling.

Children today can see the world and its people on television's National Geographic series, experience news as it is made, observe re-creations of history, have access to the Library of Congress, and observe and fall victim to the conflict and violence on America's streets. In schools, we can teach children how to access, process, and challenge knowledge (roles we are still struggling with), but we are no longer the major knowledge provider.

We agree with our colleagues from Dewey (1916) to Glickman (1993) that our major purpose in schools remains the preparation of children for democratic citizenship. However, our track record here is as wanting as our role in the knowledge business. It is not surprising that when we do not offer democratic learning opportunities for children and adults, as we generally do not, we cannot expect democratic actions. However, in those rare schools and institutions in which we seek to teach democracy through experience, we tend to seek our goals through individual involvement in decision-making. Focusing on such summative actions as the polling booth and the moment

of decision-making does not engage the prerequisite lived experiences essential for democratic life. As Bellah and colleagues (1985) remind us so vividly, individuals remain individuals in this country; they have vague understandings of community but virtually no conception of interconnected, pluralistic communities or social vision. Rost (1991) resurfaces this insight as central to the demands of rethinking leadership. On the topic of leadership and civic virtue, he frames some essential aspects of the dilemma:

Leaders and followers need to develop a new language of civic virtue to discuss and make moral evaluations of the changes they intend for organizations and societies. This new language of ethics must center on an integrated concept of the common good, of our social ecology as a community. (p. 177)

"An integrated concept of the common good" or common purpose can only be found in interconnected, ecological communities. We propose that *the purpose of schooling today* is to engage children and adults within patterns of relationships in school communities that serve as centers for sustained growth. Experiences in ecological communities can produce a common purpose for schooling, encompassing aims that extend beyond self-interest to the growth and well-being of children, their families, and society. Moral educational communities come into existence as people learn to grow together. The purposes referenced in our definition of constructivist leadership involve a commitment to the growth of children and adults as well as a commitment to communities and societies that sustain such growth.

If participants are constructing their own meanings and knowledge, how can we be assured that the common purpose of schooling will entail such a moral commitment? This confidence arises from a faith in ecological communities as enabling their participants to coevolve morally. As this coevolution takes place, caring, equity, and justice seem to surface as guiding values (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976). Poplin (1994) claims that in the work *Voices* the process created shared meanings that led to larger moral purpose—"teachers reconnected with their reasons for going into teaching."

Participation in ecological communities softens and makes fluid and permeable the lines between "self" and "other." Since the development of the self is interdependent with the evolution of the other, Zohar and Marshall argue (1994): "The mechanistic perception of the 'other' as threat gives way to a perception of the other as one who evokes my own latent possibilities. . . . *The . . . other is my necessity*" (p. 193; emphasis added). When individuals and others share a common experience of growth in an educational community, they experience an increased responsibility for others. We become committed to "a cause beyond oneself" (Glickman, 1993, p. 15).

Within the context of these lived experiences, diversity opens up possibilities, helping us to see the multiple perspectives and world views of others.

This revised purpose of schooling demands a rethinking of all aspects of our educational institutions, a commitment to a new set of goals. Knowledge now serves as "grist for the mill" for both students and adults, a basis for framing big questions, for conversations, and for learning the thinking and collaborative skills essential to a democracy. Purpose, like vision, emerges from the conversations. Educators, in turn, can become "constrained by purpose" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 115) rather than by institutionally defined boundaries. This sense of renewed purpose can be made possible through the processes of constructivist leadership.

ACTS OF LEADERSHIP

An "act of leadership," as distinguished from role leadership, is the performance of actions (behaviors plus intention) that enable participants in a community to evoke potential within a trusting environment, to reconstruct or break set with old assumptions, to focus on the construction of meaning, or to frame actions based on new behaviors and purposeful intention. Everyone in the school community can perform an act of leadership. Leadership is an inclusive field of processes in which leaders do their work.

Those who perform acts of leadership need

- A sense of purpose and ethics, because honesty and trust are fundamental to relationships
- Facilitation skills, because framing, deepening, and moving the conversations about teaching and learning are fundamental to constructing meaning
- An understanding of constructivist learning for all humans
- A deep understanding of change and transitions, because change is not what we thought it was
- An understanding of context so that communities of memories can be continually drawn and enriched
- A personal identity that allows for courage and risk, low ego needs, and a sense of possibilities.

As Poplin and her colleagues found, educators generally enter life's work with *a sense of purpose and ethics*. Perhaps it is primitive and sketchy, certainly it is vulnerable. Recently, I heard a young teacher, Susan, in her third year of teaching, say that she had entered the profession because she wanted to make a difference with kids. Midway through the second year, she had

begun to question her options, her possibilities. Yet as she sat in an initial meeting to plan for a professional practice school, she reported that this feeling of purpose began to resurface. So easily lost; so easily regained. So vulnerable.

Perhaps all educators were Susans at one point. What has happened? Do educators still possess that sense of purpose with which they began their work? Can it be recaptured? We believe so. Those who initiate an act of leadership are usually those who have held on tight to their purposes or who have been reawakened, experiencing a pattern of relationships that has helped to resurface and perhaps redefine and extend those original compelling purposes into ethical behavior. For them, a sense of coherence and authenticity contributes to the establishment of trust in communal relationships.

Those performing acts of leadership find *facilitation skills* essential to creating engagement in reciprocal processes among leaders in a community. These skills are vital to everyone in "Leading the Conversations" (Chapter 4). When I entered my third year of teaching, I discovered in the interview that all teachers and administrators in my new school were expected to participate in 30 hours of training in open communication, shared decision-making, problem-solving, and accountability. The school was genuinely founded on these four principles, and everyone was a leader expected to facilitate the processes. What a phenomenal experience—one that influenced me dramatically later as a principal, and one that helped me to negotiate the next 25 years of educational experience through a unique lens.

An understanding of constructivist learning for all humans enables leaders to pose questions and to frame actions that cause self-construction and collegial interaction as well as the design of constructivist curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Constructivism is not an evolutionary understanding that has naturally emerged from our training and experiences in behaviorism. Constructivism is a significantly different paradigm that enables us to frame new questions and create learning based on passion, unique learning gifts and perceptions, community, and authentic work and assessment.

A deep understanding of change and transitions is also essential to jointly designing the sequencing, timing, and duration of reciprocal processes. Change that is constructivist in nature emerges from the meaning-making process and is therefore unpredictable and evolving. Preset objectives, as well as predetermined strategies and techniques that are too tightly drawn, violate the very nature of constructivism. Constructivists have goals, outcomes, and a repertoire of change strategies that focus talent and resources toward a common purpose. Attempting to harness real change that is being pulled by intention, not pushed by prediction, is so complex that its understandings can only be constructed in the conversations among co-leaders in a learning

community. The next chapter explores that which we metaphorically refer to as "sea change," a process in which the sea moves in upon itself as the entire sea shifts forward.

An understanding of the context is essential to the unity of "communities of memories," which must be drawn forth and enriched and reinterpreted. Bellah and colleagues (1985) invite us to consider this intriguing concept,

Communities, in the sense in which we are using the term, have history—in an important sense they are constituted by their past—and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory," one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative. (p. 153)

These composite and shared memories take on expanded meanings when retold together. These memories constitute a vital part of the meaning construction (and reconstruction) that goes on in schools. When a new principal enters a school, we always advise him or her to talk with people, find out about the memories, "the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community" (Bellah et al., p. 153). Embedded in these stories are the values and intentions that drive the work in the school, as well as the fears and lost hopes that form barriers to creativity and innovation. We must "contextualize" our work for each other; and this entails sketching out a frame of memories, values, assumptions, and promises that create a forum for dialogue and a stepping off place for action.

Emerging leaders are construing and interpreting themselves as they construct meaning and knowledge with others. Their *sense of personal identity* allows for courage and risk, low ego needs, and a sense of possibilities. Personal identity has been forming in reflective interactions with others. They seek not only to explain, but to listen and to understand. These individuals have outgrown the need to "win" in the traditional sense, understanding that reciprocity and high personal regard reframe "winning" into concern for moving toward a common purpose. With a growing clarity and confidence in the grounding values that guide their lives, these emerging leaders are able to cut through the cumbersome morass that sometimes envelopes our lives and ask the next essential question. Since personal efficacy is evolving in a trusting environment, these leaders work with others to create human possibilities for all children and educators. Possibilities are as diverse as the web of their relationships, since diversity arises from multiple perspectives, multiple framings.

This vision of the potential of educational leaders may not only seem ideal; it *is* ideal—and it is possible. Constructivist Leadership enables human growth that was previously reserved for the few. Others were followers, rele-

gated to second-class citizenship and second-class growth. In our traditional systems, growth was a limited resource; in ecological communities, interdependence and reciprocity require equal partners.

Who Can Lead?

Since leadership represents a possible set of actions for everyone in the community, anyone can choose to lead. Participantship, rather than follower-ship, is full engagement, as Wheatley (1992) described:

We need a different pattern, one in which we engage fully, evoking multiple meanings. . . . The more participants we engage in this participative universe, the more we access its potential and the wiser we can become. (p. 65)

Full participation leads to acts of leadership; being fully engaged in meaning-making activates one's drive toward purpose and community. One cannot help but lead; one is compelled to do so by the self-directed drive toward self-renewal and interdependency. Responsibility toward self and others surfaces as an essential developmental process. Paulo Freire's ideas (1973) have long been persuasive: "Humankind emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled" (p. 44). We would add strongly, "*to intervene*" and *to construct and to reintervene* in their realities. We have seen this over and over as staff emerge into the leadership arena: The next essential question is asked, ideas and traditions are challenged, people volunteer to lead, groups form, curiosity is aroused, verbal and nonverbal interactions change. My experiences in tough-to-change schools and institutions is that these actions begin to emerge during the first year and gain momentum about 18 months into the process. It is the participation processes that create the meaning and the understandings (the reality) to which people then commit themselves. Without these participatory opportunities, commitment is not possible, only obedience.

Students as leaders; teachers as leaders; parents as leaders; administrators as leaders. Crusty old paradigms might warn us that "too many cooks spoil the stew"; new paradigms are making a different stew. The patterns of relationships in this new "stew" connect in synergistic ways that are rich in possibilities and exist outside traditional lines of authority, roles, established norms, rules, and policies.

"Why do we continue to believe in administrative expertise?" queried Bill Foster at the American Educational Research Association gathering in April 1994. "Perhaps we lack a meaning system for administrative actions." Constructivist leadership provides a meaning system and a system of meaning making for leadership actions.

WHY CALL IT LEADERSHIP?

The kinds of educational communities described in this book are quite rare; the understandings, knowledge, and practices cited in this book are not as unique. Many centers, projects, networks, and partnerships function on notions of community, reciprocity, and purpose. The social implications of ecosystems, systems theory, and quantum physics are increasingly understood. Schools are beginning to focus more directly on student outcomes and collegiality. Why call it leadership? Why not call it the work of community or restructuring, or reculturing, as many do?

We call it leadership because these noble conceptions are isolated and fragmented: They are known, but they are just not happening. Something is missing—the glue, focus, integration, unity of spirit. Barth uses a simple, yet elegant and weighty, phrase—"making happen." Constructivist Leadership that entails

The reciprocal processes that enable . . .
participants in an educational community to construct meanings . . .
that lead toward a common purpose of schooling

is making things happen.